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White Peaks and Green

White Peaks and Green

by Ethel Romig Fuller

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White Peaks and Green

by Ethel Romig Fuller

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1933

METROPOLITAN PRESS, PUBLISHERS
PORTLAND, OREGON

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To

Charles

Contents

Concerning the Speech of Mountains 1
Dawn and New Snow 4
Fireweed 5
If I Listen Long and Long 6
Mountain Alders 7
The Grand Dalles Hills 8
Winter Evening 10
Who Knows a Mountain? 11
September 12
October 13
Fields 14
Prodigality 15
Timberline 16

A Mountain in Midsummer 17
Wind is a Cat 18
Sunset on the Columbia 19
Refugee 20
Calypsos 21
This Mountain 22
Before Storm 25
Slippers 26
The Tower Clock 27
Motoring At Night 28
Sea-Going 29
The Reflection 30
Consanguinity 31
In a Truck Garden 32
1860 33
Chinook Wind 34
Vegetable Garden 36
Black Raspberry Bushes 37
Wild Geese 38

Silver Thaw 39
The Old Bull 40
First Signs 41
Playground 42
Wheat Field 43
Rebel 44
Something Called a Shadow 45
Night Sounds 46
The Sun Rises 47
In the Park 48
Minutiæ 49
When I Remember 50
Crushed Mint 51
Eulalie 52
Cleaning Day 54
On the Market 55
Hill Dweller 56
The Certain Calm 57
These are the Strong 58

Harbingers 59
Winter Orchard 60
Tomorrow and Tomorrow 61
Dust 62
Country Doctor (To My Father) 63
Knitting Factory 64
A Song for Churning 65
The Puddle 66
Discovery 67
Orchardist 68
Labyrinth 69
When April Came 70
In the Night 71
In a Show Case 72
The Invader 73
At a Lunch Counter 74
Dream Substance 75
Poverty Buys — 76
Mother — A Portrait 77

Beads 78
To a Girl Poet with a Lover 79
Remembered Things 80
Dust Motes 81
Peter Schatt 82
Back of a Mountain 85
Bread 88
Butter 89
The New Bridge 90
Fir Forest 91

Concerning the Speech of Mountains

Mountains talk;
Lesser mountains speak the folk tongue of forests
Wherein the sweet shrill tones of green heights
Commingle strangely with the deep gutturals of canyons;
A tongue rich with the idioms of wind and rain and snow,
Poignant with the frail pink of rhododendrons,
Sibilant with rustling leaves and running water,
Bitter with tang of cedar and fir,
Accented with the precision of sword ferns,
Punctuated by falling cones and blue wings;
Its quaint and ordered forms
Older than runes,
Lovelier than psalms,
More potent than benisons of priests.

Mountains talk;
Young mountains have tongues of fire.
They harangue at length on death
Preaching a doctrine of destruction.
They make a cult of flame
And dramatize their mad convictions
In cataclysmic rumblings, horrific upheavals and molten rivers.

Mountains talk;
But old white mountains
Have learned the wisdom of repression,
The effectiveness of silence,
The eloquence of slow and awful gestures,
Uplifted palms may support the heavens,
May cup the thunders;
An extended finger may shred a cloud,
Shatter a moon-flask,
Pierce a dawn —
— Blood of a young day on snow is crimson,
Of a dying day, purple;
A clenched fist may bruise the sun.

The shadow of a white mountain across
the world
Is the measure of forever.

Mountains talk;
The loftiest mountains, still cowled in
mystery,
Commune with the prophets,
And interrogate the stars.

Mountains talk;
Their language is a composite
Of all peoples, of all lands, of all ages, of
all planets, of all seas.
Its fundamentals are beauty.

I am studying the language of mountains.

Dawn and New Snow

On the mountain
Dawn and new snow.

New snow
Smoky grey as wild asters,
Frosted like spruce needles,
Lupin blue,
Briar-rose pink.
New snow
Veined crimson in black canyons;
Penciled in sudden silver
On high ledges.

The kneeling trees at timberline
Are cowled in white wool;
The rocks are mauve-feathered
Like the breasts of doves;
The shadows of the rocks
Are muted purple.

Dawn . . .
New snow. . . .

Fireweed

It follows on the heels of carnage;
It revels in ashes. It thrives on the hot
ashes of pine needles
And fir cones; on the stilled laughter of
larches.
It inhales smoke with impunity and ex-
hales magenta flame.
It sears new wounds; it congeals on the
edges of old wounds.
It distils a strange pungency from pitch-
globules,
(Melted rosin is the death-sweat of burn-
ing trees)
It sacks ghost-honey for conspiring bees.
It ignores the decorous black of burnt-
over hills and shouts
Ribald chanteys in the charnel house.
It dances in the deserted abodes of wild
creatures;
At the dried sources of mountain brooks;
on the grave of a forest.
Fireweed . . . . .

If I Listen Long and Long

If I listen long and long
Shall I put silence into song?

Silence that is crystal-wrought
Of a thought within a thought?

Radiant silences that are
Behind a world, around a star?

Silence that will go with me
Into, beyond, eternity?

If I listen long and long . . .

Mountain Alders

I have known alders,
But none like these
Mountain-bred, virile,
Mail-clad trees.

Fine, those others,
And boy-slim, but none
Like plumed knights jousting
Their way to the sun;

None tall as wind-swayed,
Pennant-tipped spars;
None so naïvely
Proud of old scars.

The Grand Dalles Hills

These hills across the river from the town;
These Grand Dalles hills with hollow hips, and crests
That crumble on the sky; whose bony, brown
Hands clutch at clouds to cover naked breasts;
These hills rock-ribbed, gaunt, surfaced with a crust
Of ocher yellow sand; inured to hurt
Of searing suns and winds' untempered lust;
Abandoned . . . are not always thus inert.
I've seen them run down to the river's brink
At dawn with young dreams in their eyes, and pause,
Startled, to watch a golden eagle drink;
Then dropping robes of sheerest, bluest gauze

From pale limbs, leap into the water where
They shake the stars out of their tawny hair.

Winter Evening

I never tire
Of my garden in the fire.
While snow thrums on the pane
Delphiniums and goldenglow
Stand straight and tall
Against the sooty wall.
Where flames spread
Are daffodils, a tulip bed.
As the wind shrills fast and faster
I see an aster in the smoke,
Wistaria, a lilac tree;
There is a hint of mint and tansy.
A coal becomes a pansy.
And when a backlog crashes to its death
The ashes
Are white violas and babybreath.

Who Knows a Mountain?

Who knows a mountain?
One who has gone
To worship its beauty
In the dawn;
One who has slept
On its breast at night;
One who has measured
His strength to its height;

One who has followed
Its longest trail,
And laughed in the face
Of its fiercest gale;
One who has scaled its peaks,
And has trod
Its cloud-swept summits
Alone with God.

September

Lilies still lift
Their laughter to the sun,
Fishes carve the air
And waves still run
On glad, bare feet
Along the pebbly shore,
Lapping the wharf
And the boathouse door.
But nightwinds chant
Sagas of grief,
And the lake holds
A yellow leaf.

October

Summer is a tang of water-cress
On my mouth,
The dust of rose petals.
Birds press south.
Tomorrow — or perhaps tomorrow —
There will be snow.
Winds know,
Zinnias know
And I —
Why must there be for me
Only the way back,
Or on?
There is this quiet day,
This yellow tree . . .

Fields

Fields are gentle and will grow
What of seed and fruit men sow;
Will long yield obedience
To a harrow or a fence.
But once leave a field unplowed,
Daisies, like a summer cloud,
Will run in to kiss the meek
Seamy contours of its cheek,
And to pin with petaled stars
A veil of pity on its scars.

Prodigality

The Artificer wastes beauty so;
He is prodigal of snow.

Into night He drops a star;
It leaves behind no curved white scar.

He paints a hill with violets
Which no one sees and He forgets.

And hides the palpitating art
Of poesy in a yokel's heart.

Timberline

There are no sounds at timberline,
But the wind in a twisted pine,
Thin-voiced water where it goes
Suddenly from melted snows,
And through the omnipresent hush,
The calling of a hermit thrush
Who spins his song and leaves it there
To unravel on the air.

A Mountain in Midsummer

Her ermine mantle and her robe
Of diamond-sewn brocade,
Her ruff of lace, her silver shoes
Are worn and summer-frayed.

And yet she stands aloof and proud,
A queen for all her tatters,
Communing with the cool, wise stars
Upon celestial matters.

Wind is a Cat

Wind is a cat
That prowls at night,
Now in a valley,
Now on a height.

Pouncing on houses
Till folks in their beds
Draw all the covers
Over their heads.

It sings to the moon;
It scratches at doors;
It lashes its tail around chimneys
And roars.

It claws at the clouds
Till it fringes their silk;
It laps up the dawn
Like a saucer of milk.

Then chasing the stars
To the tops of the firs,
Curls down for a nap
And purrs, and purrs.

Sunset on the Columbia

From the trail
We saw the meager trees
Fringing the mountain's rim
Reach out slim eager fingers
And draw the great gold bubble
From a reluctant sky.
The frail ball burst,
Stabbing all the high white clouds
With rose and amber light.
Flames, amethyst and orange,
Hissed at the water's edge, and damascened
The sedge blades with silver.
A crow on somber slow wings
Flew low across a bar of crimson-crested sand.
Dogwood burned wanly among the firs.
Dusk, tiptoeing over the valley floor
Threw misty blurs of larkspur blue
About the drowsy canyons.
Someone touched a taper to a star.
Sleep beckoned from the cabin door.

Refugee

To escape from grief
I ran to cover;
A place four-walled
And roofed over.

Beaten out by despair
I fled to the sea.
Horizons and sky
Encompassed me.

A wave broke white,
A lone gull called . . .
I was back in my covert,
Roofed and walled.

Calypsos

In this solemn wood
Was treasure-trove
Of elfin orchids,
Piquant, mauve.

As unseemly
As a birch
In the dooryard
Of a church;

As a red curl
In a locket
Hidden in
A beadle's pocket.

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This Mountain

And I shall have this mountain as memory.
Always.

For sleepless nights
It shall be a cool pillow,
Moon-linen,
Quilts of dusks —
Satin, blue, filled with the down of shadows.
Water shall sing under ice.
There shall be soporific of pine,
Ancient wind,
Peace.

For moments of exultation
Dead rocks shall come alive
And leap, madly.
At the mis-step of a glacier
The stable ground shall quake;
There shall be mutability of certitude;
Tragedy of triumph.

For vigil
There shall be thrill of an ascent;
Crevasses to skirt,
Arêtes to traverse, step by careful step,
Footholds to be hacked in green ice,
The tug of an encircling rope.
There shall be bubbles of steam
Blown from the lips of fissures,
And the sulphuric breath of a sleeping
monster;
And at length
A dizzying last peak conquered —
Top of the world;
Heaven within toss of a voice.

For joy
There shall be mountain noon,
White-hot, white-cold;
Acres of glazed snow, sun-faceted,
Lava-green cataracts;
A dazzling hour,
And frangible . . .

For pain
There shall be anodynes of dawns
Frosted rose-silver;
Blue flowers at the edge of snow;
Avalanche lilies.
There shall be tortured trees at timberline
Enduring . . .

For fever
Water dripping from snow,
And the breath of snow.

For black sorrow
Glaciers dying that rivers may be born;
Clouds, the avatars of waters, lost in seas;
Beauty transcending beauty;
The forever behind forever.

Before Storm

In the forest
Is no fleet
Staccato hurry
Of small feet.

Is no subtle
Undertone
Of wing-brushed leaf
Or falling cone.

Yet as I listen
Something stirs
The tense branches
Of the firs;

Something pauses
With a sigh
Above the trees
And — passes by.

Slippers

When I was young
And my slippers were red
I could kick higher
Than my own head.

When I grew up
And my slippers were white
I could dance the stars
Right out of the night.

Now I am old!
My slippers are black;
I walk to the corner
And I walk back.

The Tower Clock

From the tower clock
A faëry chime
At mystic mid-hour
Shakes down time.

Shakes down time
As winds in May
Toss twelve petals
Of cherry spray.

Shakes down time
As Heaven jars
From their moorings
Twelve gold stars.

Motoring at Night

The ebon-winged hills
Were no sooner defined
As shapes on the sky
Than we left them behind.

A tree, like a runner,
Loping before,
Sprinted a mile or two
Then was no more.

But the rollicking moon
With his mangy mist-hound
Crashed through the forest
Bound after bound

To the side of the car,
Nor could we outride
His curious stare,
His seven-league stride.

Sea-Going

Out where sea and sky curve into one —
Calm, yellow sky, gold-crested leaping
    sea —
I saw a great ship riding to the sun,
A smoke-wraith following her wistfully.
Her funnels and her even, ebon keel —
Faëry chimneys and wave-winged slender
    frame —
Too motionless, too perfect, too unreal;
A dream-ship limned in momentary flame.
I wondered at the cargo which she bore,
Cedar, perhaps, or fruit, or ancient gold;
I visioned faces from the lonely shore,
And hopes and fears stowed in the long,
    slim hold . . .
She faded to a distant, dusky blur,
And all my heart went yearning after
    her.

The Reflection

Often I forget to look
In shop windows as I pass,
I am so intent upon
A reflection in the glass.

Strange indeed it should appear
Dowdy, squat and small,
When at heart it is so slim
And elegantly tall.

Consanguinity

I thought to lose a bitter mood
In a forest solitude.

The brooding stillness served to stress
My heart-broken loneliness.

Twanging fingers in a pine
Flicked those taut nerve-strings of mine,

And mirrored in a tragic pool
Was the visage of a fool.

In a Truck Garden

All day with the sun
On her small curved back,
Hunching along
On a gunnysack,

She weeded the tender,
Young onions, or set
Cabbages out,
If the ground was wet.

Her eyes seemed riveted
To the rows,
And what she was thinking
Nobody knows.

But once when a white-winged
Plane soared by,
She lifted her head
And scanned the sky

As a mole from its burrow
Might gape at a bird;
Then squatted down
With never a word.

1860

Her daddy was a gentleman,
White, ah, white!
Her mammy a comely wench
But black, quite.

She, the sweet of either,
Was palest honey-brown;
They stood her on the auction block
And sized her up and down.

They wrenched her mobile lips apart
And felt her slender thighs;
Appraised her hair for its straight length,
Her creamy-lidded eyes.

Bids furiously running
The gamut of her charms;
Gold-budded breasts, patrician throat,
Her ankles and her arms.

And all the quivering grace of her
Slim as a willow bole;
"Going, going, going, gone!"
And heaven rest her soul!

Chinook Wind

At dawn Chinook Wind strode over the hills.
The black feather in his hair sang to the swiftness of his coming.
His bare knees gleamed like copper suns.
With a lash woven of mists, he herded the wild cattle of winter from the mountains.
He tore the storm clouds from the heights and tossed them into canyons.
He poured flagons of warm rain down the throats of valleys.
He laughed, and woke a waterfall; he shouted, and blue-eyed lakes peered through rifts in the ice.
He leaned on the huge flank of a fir; it shook the snow from its mighty mane and pawed the sky.
Where he ran down the furrows of a field, wheat sprouted; where he rested on a meadow, it was clothed in sudden green; where he leapt over a swamp,

willows became gold wands, osiers, crimson-tipped arrows; where he circled a hazel copse, pale yellow mist fringed the bushes.

At dusk he departed swiftly.

With his going, limpid sea water flowed into the hollow of the sky; a crystal ram's horn swung on the highest branch of a cottonwood; a tracery of frost limned every blue shadow.

There was a tang of wild honey on the air.

Vegetable Garden

Strange
How carrots toil
To yellow length
In the selfsame soil
Where beets spin purple tops;
Where potatoes grow
Neat brown crops
Down the radiant pink length
Of radish rows.
. . . .
One stops to think . . .

Black Raspberry Bushes

Like maidens in aprons with white
fluted frills,
In April they dance with the wind up the
hills.

Sedately in summer they carry the symbols
Of matronly thrift — needles and thim-
bles.

Prim little old women in winter they go
In stiffly starched dresses of mauve calico.

Wild Geese

I saw a Gypsy caravan
Careening swiftly by,
A nomad fleet vignetted
Against a silver sky.

They passed in strange formation,
Ebon wedge-shaped bars;
Signaling the amber moon,
Steering by the stars.

In their barbaric chanteys
Ringing wild and free,
Were all the songs I cannot sing
And all their poignancy.

Silver Thaw

Because of some strange alchemy
The rain turned to crystal as it fell,
And drowned each tiniest twig and leaf
    In a pellucid well.

A belated crimson rose —
Sweet survivor of the fall —
Became a lovely lambent flame
    In a blown-glass ball.

I shivered as I took it
In my hands to hold;
How should I know a thing of fire
    Could be so cold?

The Old Bull

Always at dusk's still hour, the old bull
came
Slowly through the trees to contemplate
From the hill's brim, the aftermath of
flame,
And to nuzzle the padlocked pasture gate.
Behind him in the shadows of the wood
A host of shadowy figures seemed to mull
In the gold-slanted dust, the while he
stood
Outlined on the sky, gaunt, unbeautiful.
He alone of some long-vanished horde
Remained; a king deposed; set there
apart;
He pawed the earth with baffled hooves
and poured
A cry of hunger from a breaking heart.
Then listened, trembling in every limb,
As Echo hurled it, empty, back to him.

First Signs

When with my sharpened plough I prod
The reluctant, inert sod
From sleep, the drowsy turf
Exhales a breath that's some of surf,
And drying kelp and tang of brine,
Some of the pungency of pine,
Of dusty bracken, cone-tipped fir,
Of mignonette, of lavender,
Of sweetbriar, rosemary and rue;
Some of frost and some of dew,
Some of smoke from burning leaves;
Some of sun on ripe corn sheaves—
A potpourri of scents all sealed
In the black breast of a field,
And shattered now for heralding
The white imminence of spring.

Playground

In the middle of town
There is a stray
Square of ground
Where children play.

Where little running
Feet have trod
Out every flower
And spear of sod.

And yet I think
It's gladder — lots —
Than any tended
Garden spots.

Wheat Field

Destinies and dynasties
Hang on your breath;
Why not and why not,
O life out of death?

When millions on millions
Have perished to make
Soil for the substance
You sentiently take

As gold for your seed-heads,
And transmute again
Into beauty of women
And lean strength of men?

Rebel

When I am dead and, as I must,
Exchange this pulsing flesh for dust —
Such dust I promise you as will
Be anything but meek and still —
Dust of my lips in that re-birth
Shall draw the very rain from earth;
Purple dust of eyes endue
Grape hyacinths with beaded blue;
Dust of quick hands come to be
Petals on an apple tree;
Finest dust, the dust of hair,
Tangled in a gold gorse snare;
Feet of me flaked brown as rust
Quaint runners in a windy gust;
What other flecks remain shall flare
Passionately on the air,
Swirling dancers in the sun —
Say not to me — oblivion!

Something Called a Shadow

Something called a shadow lives in a tree,
It creeps forth at dawn, oh, wistfully
From leaf and branch until it is laid
Across the earth in a shape of shade.

Something that waits quietly on grass
For the lingering last sun-rays to pass;
Something broken and raggedly thinned
When a tree is racked and flailed by wind.

Something that leans on water or a wall
And leaves no impress, so light its fall;
Something whose hesitant feet still tread
On the sun's heels when a tree is dead.

Night Sounds

Night sounds
Are pointed and fine;
Wraith fingers strumming
Lute strings in a pine.

Brooks thinly trickling
From old earthern jars,
The guttering flames
Of burned-out stars.

Dust shattered
By summer rain,
And wind like moccasined feet
In grain.

The Sun Rises

The mountain leans against the sky
As lightly as if blown
From out a dream of ancient Greece,
And carved of Parian stone.

A Discobolus, it bends
In its colossal pose,
And as I look, it leaps to life
With sudden gold and rose.

Its arm describes an arc of flame;
It lets the discus fly!
Once more the sun rolls swiftly to
Its goal across the sky.

In the Park

Asters' purple candles gutter low,
Maple's flame is but an amber glow.

Yet bees still loot the honey-crocks
Of tardy crimson hollyhocks,

And through the birches, silver-grey,
A wind remembers May.

Minutiæ

In an exploratory mood
I stripped my soul down to the nude.

Then not content I bared the mesh
Of tissue-web beneath the flesh.

A spirit-seed was in the pod;
Was it devil? Or was it God?

When I Remember

There is a lonelier place than a dune
With a sullen sea crumbling the edges;
With old whining winds harassing the
    sands
And rumpling the sedges.

There is a lonelier place than a dune
With a scud of grey clouds in November —
There is my heart (O low-flying gull!)
When I remember.

Crushed Mint

Something wakened me at dawn —
Grass was bent beneath the dew —
A sound I could not understand,
A tang of fragrance strange and new.

But when I hastened out to look,
There was nothing but the print
Of a little cloven hoof
Stamped upon a bed of mint.

Eulalie

Are ye happy,
Eulalie,
So high, so far
Above the sea?

"My sea," — her voice
Was proud —
"Is the valley
Filled with cloud."

"From my cabin
I look down . . .
For masts, I've steeples
In the town."

Ah, Eulalie,
The blowing brine —
"Up here there's tang
Of fir and pine."

And thundering waves,
Say, what of these?
"I have the wind
In tall green trees."

Still, don't ye miss
The wheeling gull?
"Nay, eagles are
So beautiful."

Eulalie,
Ye will stay on?
"Oh, aye! So long
As there is John!"

Cleaning Day

Who is the weaver
Of the sheer
Faëry fabric
I find here?

Who fills the corners
Of my room
With the product
Of her loom?

Who toils all night
To fit in place
What in a moment
I erase?

Ho, witchling,
With the spinneret,
I'll catch you yet,
I'll catch you yet.

On the Market

Housewives crowd
From stall to stall
Appraising vegetables
In fall.

Do they but think
Of ways to use
The gorgeous things
In soups and stews?

Oh, I can see
A palm, a parrot,
In a green and yellow
Carrot,

And a summer
All compressed
In a ripe tomato's
Breast.

Hill Dweller

For him who builds his house upon a hill
The sun is looped with peaks in purple tiers;
Tall cedars flail the sky at the wind's will,
A crystal river flashes, disappears.
Storms hold wild carnival; lightnings parade;
Fledgling days creep from a flamingo's breast;
Night mines the stars with a deep-driven spade,
Moons die in glory and mists haunt the crest.
Who builds his house upon a hill, his hips
Are girt with wide horizons, and his thirst
Is quenched by valleys lifted to his lips.
Each hour's a play for him alone rehearsed.
A net is woven for him out of rain
And there's a catch of dreams within the seine.

The Certain Calm

For harassed minds, for hearts assailed by
ills,
For all abrasions of the soul, all scars,
There is a panacea of tall hills,
The healing balm of rediscovered stars;
The scent of dew on sleeping ferns and
grass,
The flight of homing winds to waiting
trees,
And there are clouds that brush the moon
and pass . . .
Shadows and dark's pulsating subtleties.
Before the constancy of night and sky;
The certain calm; the peace . . . if any
grieves,
He'll shed unhappiness and let it lie
As maples drop their weight of yellow
leaves.
And so detached from pain and comforted
May even for a space forget the dead.

These are the Strong

Not rushing, sudden water,
Not wild and bitter wind,
Not a body hanging
For the black deed he has sinned;

Not streams of molten lava,
Not showers of meteors,
Not tidal waves or thunder,
Not famine and not wars

Can prevail against the birthing
Of a baby or a song —
These are the strong, my brothers,
These are the strong.

Harbingers

These are spring's first harbingers —
A lifting of frost-burdened firs;
Rose-red lacquered osier wands
Piercing sudden shallow ponds;
On the sky, a willow tree
Limned in pale gold filigree;
Meadows burnished with a sheen
Of the frailest, stillest green;
A tang of honey on the air;
Water singing everywhere
And winds as wistful as the breath
Of one returned from death — from death.

Winter Orchard

These apples lying on the ground
Are the wormy and unsound;
Their unblemished brothers hymn
Holiness from every limb.

Yet which is lovelier filigree —
The fallen, or those on the tree?
And where is choice in either lot?
The saints dry up; the sinners rot.

Tomorrow and Tomorrow

I am an old, old man;
My yesterday
Is spent; I have no lien
On today.

But tomorrow and tomorrow —
They are mine to keep;
Fill my pipe with dust of dreams
And let me sleep.

Dust

As a child
I could not run care-free
On the path
Between the hollyhock rows
Until I had dusted chairs
And an old walnut highboy.
I was given clouds
Of pink and blue cheese-cloth
To hem for dusters.

I have spent more hours with dust
Than with dawns or dreams.

Dust has even come between me and the
stars.

In that clean, orderly city on the hill
There is dust;
Alabaster,
Mother of pearl,
Ebon boxes of dust.
* * * * * * *
Flowers grow out of dust.

Country Doctor

(To my Father)

Beneath his linen duster, sagged and bent,
Day out, day in, for fifty years or more,
Up the red clay hills and down he went,
His black square case upon the buggy floor.
I've heard his horses pounding down the lanes
Lashed to desperate lather and to foam;
I've seen him give the weary team the reins
And worn out, sleep, the while they ambled home.
His eyes were set in crinkled lines of mirth,
Cheer was prescribed with bitter calomel,
He was the arbiter of death and birth,
The go-between of Heaven and of Hell.
Tender as woman, steadfast as a rock,
Small wonder all the hill-folk loved 'Old Doc!'

Knitting Factory

Turn, spindles, zoom, zoom!
Blue wool on every loom.
Swiftly, swiftly, buzz, whir! —
Bumblebees on larkspur,
Honeybees on harebells —
The hungry music wells, swells.
Fields of camas flowers bloom
Down the white length of the room.
Moon-blue, snow-blue
Winged shadows drift through —
Twirl, swirl, untwist,
Spin rain, weave mist,
Reel dreams, wind songs,
Shred sky on steel prongs!
Drown sky under water,
Shape a gown for Eve's daughter.
Blue wool, blue wool,
Rhythmic color — beautiful!

A Song for Churning

Churning is music;
Come, child, and learn
Old dance steps
From a rhythmic churn.

Come, child, and hear
What the dasher is saying
Of wind in clover,
Of grasses swaying.

Come, make your body
A slim green stem,
Make your arms flowers
With rain on them.

Make leaves of your fingers —
Young leaves a-flutter —
Come, child, and dance
To the splashing of butter.

The Puddle

I stepped into a puddle
Not knowing it was there;
My eyes were on the sunset,
My head was in the air.

At first it made me angry
And spoiled the glorious view
Until I saw the puddle
Had its feelings ruffled too.

But when the pool was quiet,
I had a glad surprise,
For all the lovely colors
Were reflected in its eyes.

Discovery

Birds know limitations;
Unseen bars
Turn them back frustrated
This side of stars.

Even dreams, untrammeled
By fear of sky,
Beat upon the sun
And die.

But faith, uplifted
On its own winged leaven,
Transcends the universe
And crashes into heaven.

Orchardist

Here is the orchard
Of my neighbor
And it is mine
Without the labor;
Pink and green
And winter greying
Without the plowing
And the spraying.

As for the proud
Ripe fruit, not all
Branches grow inside
A wall.
And so when winds
Come laughing, shaking,
There too are apples
For the taking.

Labyrinth

Some go up
And some go down
The streets of the
Familiar town.

Purposefully
To and fro
As if they knew
Wherefore they go.

And yet each treads
A wilderness
Of inner joy
And of distress;

A maze of paths
So intercrossed —
Though no one guesses —
All are lost.

When April Came

We cut the name
Of our little lass
In the lawn's
Smooth, tender grass.

Planting crocuses,
Blue and gold,
To heal the hurt
Of the upturned mold.

Packets of royal hue;
That they
Might blaze into bloom
On her natal day.

. . . .

Save for their delicate
Chaliced flame
None answered to "Lucy,"
When April came.

In the Night

I awoke in the night;
Above the rain
There was the sound
Of a passing train,
The clickity-click
Of a passing train.

It whistled a crossing,
It whistled until
It whistled an echo
From over a hill,
Whoo — oo, whoo — oo!
From over a hill.

I turned the key
In my bosom lest
It whistle the heart
Right out of my breast,
Heart of me, heart of me
Out of my breast.

In a Show Case

Butterfly wings imprisoned under glass,
Bounded by the oval of a plaque;
Each day their beauty calls me as I pass —
Butterfly wings.

It calls me, and often I turn back
To view again that burnished mass
Scintillating on the rack.

Why should these jewel-like fragments so harass
The heart? Silver, blue, gold and black
Broken bits of loveliness — alas!
Butterfly wings.

The Invader

A wind swept through the casement
Bearing on its tide
Argosies of fragrance
From the countryside;

Invading every corner
Of the fusty room
With memories and petals
And eloquence of bloom.

My soul cast off its sandals,
And unbound its hair,
And leaping through the window
Left me sitting there.

At a Lunch Counter

As he lifts the salver
With unconscious grace —
The natural heritage
Of a burden-bearing race —

I think of strong backs bending
To a sampan's sweep;
Of high-pitched voices lifting
To its raucous creak;

Of hosts of small brown women,
Who stoically have gone
To the old, old rice fields
In the pagan dawn;

And of a naïve people
That for ages fell
Prostrate at the summons
Of a temple bell.

Dream Substance

Only a dream
Could partake
Of the thin black
Of this lake.

Of the sun's
Sifted sheen
And shadows through
Willowy green.

Of a dragonfly's
Frail gauze
Wings shimmering
To a pause

Over a lily's
Elfin metals —
Mist-gold heart,
Mist-silver petals.

Poverty Buys — —

Poverty buys me
Stranger things than money —
Wintergreen berries,
Fireweed honey.

A gold bird on
A last year's thistle,
Wild ginger and
A willow whistle.

A fat moon in
A deep black ditch —
I shall tickle its belly
With an osier switch.

Mother — A Portrait

Her hands have much
Of Christ-like touch.

Her smile on one
Is benison.

Her silver hair,
A halo rare.

Her step, a sound
On Holy ground.

Her dear face lined,
But kind — kind.

Of women, best
And loveliest.

Beads

Pomegranate stains
On a gold-leaf skin;
Hair, ebon-winged,
With a flower thrust in.

Eyes, sloe-slanted;
The whorl of a throat
Honey above
A pigeon-blue coat.

"Seed-pearls and ivory,
Coral and jade . . ."
(Yellow plums, thumbs
Of a small brown maid.)

Shadows . . . a voice . . .
Is wind crying?
Is a white heron
Slowly flying

At dusk over
Rice fields and reeds?
. . . . .
A Chinese girl in a shop
Sells beads.

To a Girl Poet with a Lover

Girl with a Gift, you cannot be
Both love of Love and Poesy.

Love *love*, dear child, and you will find
Constancy and peace of mind.

Become mistress of the Muse;
He will play you fast and loose.

(Sons of young love should be strong;
Certain-frail, a first-born song.)

Love will be the counterpart
Of a steadfast, gentle heart.

Muse is passionate and bold,
Blowing hot and blowing cold.

Love will wrap you in a shawl;
Muse will bare you, soul and all.

If I dared, I'd say, "Forget!
Forget the Muse!" — and yet — and
yet —

Remembered Things

Remembered things are like bits of music;
Aprils starred with daffodils,
Wild violets spread in a tufted quilt,
A lake set in gold-green hills.

Pear trees coifed in white like Breton maids,
The witchery of a moon-sweet hour,
Candles burning Christmas eve,
The fragile beauty of a flower.

Remembered things are like bits of music;
Not all songs have a glad refrain —
The day my mother's soul departed
Was grey with rain.

Dust Motes

Dust of the gold air,
Were you a dancer?
The slender, the silver girl-flame
Called a dancer?

Were you the contours
Of round breasts and slim thighs?
Were you bronze lashes
And amber of young eyes?

Were you the tinted delight
Of frail gauzes?
Of winged feet in rhythmic
Pale flashes and pauses?

There is no wind;
A breath then must stir you;
If not a dancer,
What were you? What were you?

Peter Schatt

Peter Schatt came west, when West was new,
Staked out a claim four-square and true;
Lived there alone, homesteaded it,
Then, unlike others, didn't quit,
But added to his holdings till
His lands included all Schatt's Hill.
He built great barns and a log house
Beneath the fragrant cedar boughs;
And sent "outside" for a hausfrau,
A team of Percherons, a cow.
He laid a road and surfaced it
With stone hauled from Schatt's gravel pit;
He felled the forest, blasted stumps,
Cut alder and vine maple clumps;
Grubbed out the rampant poison oak —
The slashings made a mighty smoke!
And as the ground was cleared and bare,
Set row on row of fruit trees there.
(No better prunes than Schatt's are known!)

Then as his ten fine sons were grown
He deeded each a fertile plot —
So generous was Peter Schatt! —
To plant to walnuts, grain or what.
And to his daughters was as fair
For when each wed, she had her share.
As for the children they begot,
There was a tract for every tot —
A double tract for those named Schatt!
He built a school and saw it fill
With youngsters born upon Schatt's Hill;
And, this the undiverging rule,
Schatt schoolma'ams *only* taught Schatt's
school.
He was the law; an erring Schatt
Was evicted and forgot.
He raised a place for worship too —
A family to every pew —
A church that ell-wise might be pieced
Out as the tribe of Schatt increased;
An edifice with bell and spire,
Schatts in the pulpit, in the choir,
And on their knees to lieber Gott,

(Who is to blame them if they thought
In lineaments *He* was a Schatt?)
Still even Schatts are not immortal;
The patriarch died—but with a chortle
That with the grave was nowise stopped
The root and branch of Peter Schatt.

Back of a Mountain

A man lived alone where wind is born,
Where night is a hawk and noon is morn;
Back of a mountain on a tittle of land
Thin as a crust, wide as a hand.

(A slice of earth is the size of a tittle,
Almost too steep for a plow to whittle;
Just room — no more — for a kepp of wild bees,
For a strawberry plot, for a windrow of trees.

And for a cabin, shake-sided and small,
To cling like a midge to a wrinkled rock wall.)
And there was the mountain for mother and wife,
For joy and for grief like a two-bladed knife.

There were dawns; there were noons in faceted rows;
There were intimacies of stars and of snows;

There were swift-flowering summers, and winters with hoary
Drifts piling to his low second story.

Then a stranger with speech that burst like a rocket
With plans for an inn and a pike in his pocket,
Climbed to the eyrie and offered him money
For tittle and cabin, strawberries and honey.

And somehow by sundown the tittle was sold,
The mountain exchanged for a wallet of gold;
Repleteness of days bartered off for a tally
Of hours slowly notched one by one from a valley.

. . . . . .

Long after a man passed that way alone—
He strode like a king who returns to his own.

He carried his head as if death were a
crown
And he went up the mountain and never
came down.

Bread

Wheat is still. It makes no sound
As it pushes from the ground.

As it runs its slow, serene
Course in rows of tender green.

Wheat is quiet; as it grows
It only whispers what it knows.

Wheat is mute — till it is fed
To children as a loaf of bread.

Then it is laughter; it is song;
It is clamor all day long.

Butter

Butter is music of wind that passes
Through blue alfalfa and supple grasses.

It is sun on meadows; it is lyric notes
Of rain and honey in clover throats.

It is the pale gold rhythmic tread
Of summer on a slice of bread.

The New Bridge

The new bridge
Spanning the Willamette
Is a nude boy
Leaping a stream.
It is swift sure grace,
White abandon,
Laughter.
It is an unsullied impulse
Arrested in concrete.

Fir Forest

Up above, a passing breeze
Undulates the tops of trees,
But in the green depths where I sit
Is no stir or feel of it.
No grass blade bends; no leaf turns;
No breath disturbs the peace of ferns.
Only in the cool, sweet hush
Is the call of thrush to thrush,
And all around me everywhere
A gentle sound like murmured prayer.

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgment is gratefully made of the courtesy of the following publications in permitting the use of copyrighted poems:

Sunset: Orchardist, Black Raspberry Bushes, Timberline, A Mountain in Midsummer, Wild Geese, When I Remember, Cleaning Day.

The Commonweal: If I Listen Long and Long, Motoring at Night, The Old Bull, Country Doctor, Slippers, Crushed Mint, First Signs.

The New York Times: The Sun Rises, Hill Dweller.

American Mercury: Concerning the Speech of Mountains.

Modern Priscilla: Winter Evening.

The Frontier: Dawn and New Snow, Calypsos, The Grand Dalles Hills, Fireweed, Peter Schatt, Back of a Mountain.

Hollands: Playground.

Contemporary Verse: Something Called a Shadow, At a Lunch Counter.

Poetry: Labyrinth, Dust Motes, Knitting Factory, Beads, Poverty Buys —, Winter Orchard.

The Christian Century: Who Knows a Mountain, Consanguinity, Prodigality, The Certain Calm, Tomorrow and Tomorrow, Sea-going, Minutiae, When April Came, Discovery, Harbingers.

The Forge: Night Sounds, Wheat Field, Chinook Wind, Fields, 1860, Rebel.

The Ladies' Home Journal: Wind is a Cat.

Muse and Mirror: Silver Thaw, Dust, In a Show Case, The Invader, The Reflection, To a Girl Poet With a Lover, These Are the Strong.

The New York Sun: Mountain Alders, In the Night, Refugee.

The Harp: Eulalie.

The Christian Science Monitor: A Song for Churning.

The Charleston Evening Post: Dream Substance.

The Youth's Companion: The Puddle.

The Lyric West: Remembered Things, On the Market, The Tower Clock, This Mountain, The New Bridge.

The Buccaneer: In the Park.

San Francisco Review: Before Storm.

The Tanager: Sunset on the Columbia.

The Northwestern Miller: Bread, Butter.

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